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(54) Title: **HIGH PURITY ELECTROLYTIC SULFONIC ACID SOLUTIONS**

(57) Abstract: Disclosed is a solution for an electrochemical process, the solution containing a sulfonic acid and having a low concentration of sulfur compounds, either low or high valence, that are susceptible to reduction and which is intended for use in electrodeposition, batteries, conductive polymers and descaling processes.

HIGH PURITY ELECTROLYTIC SULFONIC ACID SOLUTIONS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTIONFIELD OF THE INVENTION

[001] The present invention relates to high purity sulfonic acids and their use in electrochemical processes, methods for preparing such high purity acids, methods for preparing high purity metal-sulfonate or sulfonic acid solutions, and products formed by using such methods and solutions.

PRIOR ART

[002] Electrochemical processes may contain acid electrolytes to impart conductivity and thus lower the required voltage, aid in the dissolution of metal (e.g., formation of metal salts) and metal oxides (e.g., descaling), aid in the deposition of metals from aqueous solutions (e.g., electrodeposition), and may be used in the synthesis of conductive polymers to provide proton conduction and in batteries to aid in the dissolution and solvation of metals such as zinc and lead.

[003] There are many acids that may be used in the above applications such as sulfuric, nitric, phosphoric, sulfamic, and hydrochloric acid as well as phosphonic and sulfonic acids. The choice of the acids is very dependent upon the application and the purity of the acid. For example, hydrochloric acid is not typically used to descale ferrous-based metals due to its propensity for pitting corrosion in the metal. Sulfuric acid is not often used in the electrodeposition of silver or lead-based alloys due to the likelihood of metal precipitation in this acid.

[004] There are also usually several grades or purities of acids and the choice of grade is often again dependent upon the industrial application. For example, sulfuric acid may be purchased as technical grade, reagent grade, electronic grade and microelectronic grade. Technical grade has the most impurities and is therefore not used in metal electrodeposition solutions as required in the microelectronic field.

[0005] Recently, sulfonic acids, including alkane sulfonic acids, have gained acceptance in many commercial applications due in large part to (a) their ability to solubilize metals that are insoluble in acids such as sulfuric acid, are typically non-corroding acids like hydrochloric, (b) being reducing acids unlike nitric acid and (c) being more stable than sulfamic acid at low to moderate pH and elevated temperatures.

[0006] Additionally, improvements in electroplating solutions and techniques have been made (a) to meet increased standards for plating and (b) to be able to plate under more highly difficult circumstances.

[0007] Most improvements focused on the use of organic additives such as suppressor additives, accelerator additives and leveling additives and the like to obtain the desired results.

[0008] However, even with the improvements in electroplating processes, circumstances may exist that can lead to plating defects due to inadequate coverage in recess areas such as in the vias or trenches or through-holes in electronic devices, poor corrosion resistance of the deposited metal, too high a residual stress leading to cracking in the metal coating or a rough, commercially unacceptable deposit. These defects can occur as a result of an imbalance of the organic additives intended to obtain the desired metallic coating.

[0009] Also, the useful lifetime of many metal electrodeposition electrolytes is dependent upon the breakdown of the organic additives, particularly the sulfur-containing accelerator additive.

[0010] It is well known in the industry that by having typical low valent sulfur-containing accelerator type additive such as those used in acid copper, nickel, cobalt and iron solutions, uniform plating of particularly low to high aspect ratio vias and microvias and other difficult-to-plate electronic features such as through-holes in printed circuit boards is possible.

[0011] Typical accelerator or brightener additives contain one or more low valent sulfur atoms, and typically without any nitrogen atoms and a molecular weight of about 1500 or less.

In all cases, the low-valent sulfur accelerator or brightener decomposes to impart the desired effects.

[0012] However, combinations of various low-valent sulfur compounds is typically unwanted due to competitive interactions at the surface of the work piece.

[0013] Therefore, it would be desirable to control the concentration of the wanted low-valent sulfur additive in narrow ranges, often in the milligram per liter range, and to avoid the interaction with unwanted low-valent sulfur impurity molecules from the acid make-up solution.

[0014] The synthesis of conductive polymers such as polyaniline may also employ sulfonic acids to impart conductivity through protonic doping. Choi and co-workers in *Synthetic Metals* showed aniline polymerization in the presence of dodecylbenzenesulfonic acid exhibited good electrical conductivity. Dominis and co-workers in *Synthetic Metals*, studied the synthesis of polyaniline in a solution containing nonylnaphthalene sulfonic acid and found that the sulfonic acid aids in the solvation of the conductive polymer in organic media. There was no mention of the purity of the sulfonic acid used in these studies.

[0015] During the electrodeposition of nickel, iron and cobalt, additives may be employed in the aqueous electroplating solution to impart brightness to the metal deposit, decrease the stress in the metal coating, increase the corrosion protection of the underlying substrate or to achieve a desired esthetic appearance.

[0016] The composition of the additives used in the electroplating solution is dependent upon the desired metal coating. However, in general, additives for these metal electroplating baths may contain sulfur moieties as described by Lowenheim in *Modern Electroplating*, 3rd Ed. Class 1 brighteners reduce the grain size of the metal coating but also incorporate a small, about 0.03%, amount of sulfur. In the corrosion protection of steel, a duplex nickel coating is required whereby the underlying nickel (e.g., close to the steel) must not contain any sulfur in the deposit. The nickel electrolyte is formulated such that the additives do not contain reducible sulfur compounds that may eventually be co-deposited in the nickel. The top nickel layer of the duplex

contains small amounts of sulfur and corrodes preferentially compared to the underlying sulfur-free nickel coating. Bodnevas and Zahavi in *Plating and Surface Finishing*, (Dec. 1994, pg. 75) showed the effects of sulfur-bearing additives on the internal stress of nickel deposit, the incorporation of sulfur into the nickel coating and the relationship between the sulfur-additive concentration in the solution and the incorporation of elemental sulfur in the nickel deposit plated from sulfate-based solutions. If the nickel electrolytes are made using impure sulfonic acids such as those containing reduced or easily reducible sulfur compounds, the likelihood of sulfur incorporation increases significantly thus affecting the resultant stress in the deposit, the brightness of the metallic coating and the corrosion properties.

[0017] In depositing low stress nickel coatings, for use in aerospace applications, from sulfamate-based solutions, no sulfur is co-deposited in the coating even if using a conventional sulfur-bearing stress reducing agent such as 1,3,5, naphthalenetrisulfonic acid (NTS). In NTS, sulfur has an oxidation state of +6 and is not easily reduced. However, reducible sulfur compounds, if present in impure sulfonic acids, may alter the grain size of the nickel deposit and consequentially alter the stress in the metallic nickel deposit.

[0018] The synthesis of sulfonic acids may be complex and several undesirable impurities may be present in the desired sulfonic acids leading to difficulties in using sulfonic acids in electrochemical processes. Sulfonic acids may be made via the oxidation of the corresponding thiol, by hydrolysis of alkanesulfonyl halide, or by the oxidation of dimethyldisulfide. Various impurities may also be made during the oxidation or hydrolysis reaction and thus must be removed prior to use. Many low valent sulfur compounds such as sulfur (II) or sulfur (IV) or higher valent sulfur molecules such as sulfur (VI) compounds that are susceptible to reduction and are present in the sulfonic acid may produce a stench or odor, interfere with the ongoing electrochemical process or alter the final product.

[0019] Low valent or easily reducible sulfur compounds in an acidic medium may also produce an undesired sulfur stench. This stench comes from the formation of minute amounts of hydrogen sulfide, dimethylsulfide or sulfur dioxide. These materials are unwanted and dangerous during electrochemical processes.

[0020] It thus would be desirable to have new electrochemical compositions based on high purity sulfonic acids. It would be particularly desirable to have new sulfonic acid compositions that can be effectively used with metals of strong reducing capabilities such as tin, zinc and iron without deleterious effects such as odor and defects in the metal or polymer deposit. Such compositions could be used in electrodeposition, batteries, conductive polymers and de-scaling applications.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0021] The invention provides aqueous solutions for use in an electrochemical process. The solution is comprises of a sulfonic acid and low concentrations of low-valent sulfur (II) compounds and higher-valent sulfur (IV) compounds that are susceptible to reduction and that are capable of producing an unwanted odor during makeup and use and undesirable effects during electrolysis.

[0022] Compositions of the present invention are useful in processes that are tailored to meet more stringent requirements in electrodeposition of electronic circuits, conductive polymers, batteries and descaling work.

[0023] The compositions of the invention are useful for depositing a metal, modifying or cleaning a scaled metal surface or for use as acid electrolytes in batteries or during the synthesis of conductive polymers.

DETAILED DISCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0024] Compositions of the invention suitably contain a sulfonic acid with a low concentration of reduced or easily reducible sulfur species that have the ability to produce an odor during the dissolution of a metal or interfere with the electrolysis process.

[0025] It has now been found that compositions of high purity sulfonic acids, which when employed in electrochemical processes, produce no odor during make-up and use and commercially acceptable metal deposits, cleaned metal surfaces and polymer coatings are obtained.

[0026] This invention focuses on the unexpected superiority of using high purity sulfonic acids in electrochemical processes such as in electrodeposition, batteries, conductive polymers and descaling.

[0027] The sulfonic acids used in this invention have low concentrations of reduced sulfur compounds or sulfur compounds in high oxidation states that are susceptible to reduction, that are capable of producing an undesirable odor during use, during make-up of metal-sulfonate salts. These undesirable low valent sulfur compounds are also capable of producing rough or commercially unacceptable electrodeposits produced from the metal-sulfonate salt solutions. If present in sufficiently high enough concentration, the low valent sulfur compound may be incorporated into the metallic coating and thus alter the corrosion protection of the metals. The low valent sulfur compounds may also interfere with the polymerization of organic monomers to form conductive polymers.

[0028] Sulfonic acid electrolytes of the invention are characterized in significant part by comprising a low concentration of reduced sulfur compounds or sulfur compounds in a higher oxidation state that are susceptible to reduction by an active metal or during electrolysis to low valent sulfur compounds (odor-causing impurities) such as sulfides.

[0029] In particular, preferred high purity solutions of the present invention have a total concentration of reduced sulfur compounds less than about 50 mg/liter, more preferably a total concentration of at least less than 5 mg/liter, still more preferably at least less than 1 mg/liter.

[0030] In addition, other compounds may be used with the high purity sulfonic acid solutions of the present invention, such as metal salts of the sulfonic acid or other inorganic or organic metal salts, plating additives such as grain refiners, levelers, accelerators, conductivity salts, buffers, chelating agents.

[0031] The sulfonic acids of this invention may also contain oxidizing agents, reducing agents, sequestering agents, surfactants, emulsifying agents, viscosity modifiers, wetting agents, lubricants, soaps and a co-solvent. The choice of additional additives or buffers is dependent upon the operation of choice such as electrodeposition, descaling, organic monomer polymerization, energy storage devices and mixture of the above compounds may be used to effective the desired result.

[0032] The invention also relates to the production of metal salts using the high purity sulfonic acid. Metal sulfonates solutions may be produced from a variety of processes such as the electro-dissolution of a metal into the high purity sulfonic acid, dissolution of various metal oxides, carbonates or other metal salts.

[0033] The invention also includes articles of manufacture employing sulfonic acids of this invention, including electronic packaging devices such as printed circuit boards, multichip modules, semiconductor integrated circuits, mechanical-electronic machine devices (i.e., MEMS devices) and the like, batteries such as zinc-halogen, zinc-lanthanide, and vanadium-based energy storage devices, conductive polymers such as polyaniline and polypyrrole, zinc galvanized steel, tin-plated steel, automobile parts, aerospace parts and other articles of manufacturing using the sulfonic acids described in this invention.

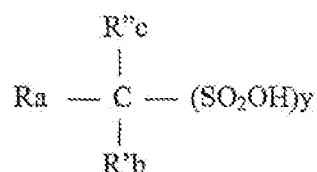
[0034] The high purity sulfonic acids of the present invention may be prepared whereby the impure sulfonic acid is first treated to remove the low-valent sulfur molecules by adding to the impure sulfonic acid an oxidizing agent to increase the valency of the impurity or low valent sulfur molecules, mixing the sulfonic acid with the oxidizing at temperatures between 25°C to about 95°C for a sufficient time to complete or nearly complete the oxidation of the low valent sulfur compounds to the higher-state sulfur compounds. Optionally, one may heat the sulfonic

acid to elevated temperatures to remove or destroy any residual oxidizing agent, and optionally, adding activated carbon powder to remove residual impurities remaining in the sulfonic acid.

[0035] Many different oxidizing agents may be used such as hydrogen peroxide, nitric acid, permanganate ion, an anodic electric current, monoperoxysulfate, an aqueous solution of chlorine, or a halogen in a solution of a carboxylic acid.

[0036] Sulfonic acids used in this invention contain impurities such as low valent sulfur (II) or sulfur (IV) compounds or higher valent sulfur (VI) compounds that are susceptible to reduction and may form odorous sulfur compounds. For example, dimethylsulfone, $\text{CH}_3\text{SO}_2\text{CH}_3$, maybe reduced to sulfur dioxide, SO_2 , or dimethylsulfide (DMS), CH_3SCH_3 . The oxidation state of sulfur in DMSO_2 is six whereas in SO_2 , sulfur is in the +four oxidation state and in DMS it is two. MMTS, $\text{CH}_3\text{SO}_2\text{SCH}_3$, which has both a sulfur(II) and a sulfur(VI) entity may be reduced by metals or electrochemically to dimethyldisulfide, $(\text{CH}_3\text{SSCH}_3)$, whereby both sulfurs are now in the +two oxidation state.

[0037] The sulfonic acid used in this invention are characterized in large part as an alkyl monosulfonic acid, an alkyl polysulfonic acid or an aryl mono or polysulfonic acid with low concentrations of reduced or easily reducible sulfur compounds and are introduced as:



wherein $a+b+c+y$ equals 4; R, R' and R'' are the same or different and each independently may be hydrogen, phenyl, Cl, F, Br, I, CF_3 or a lower alkyl group such as $(\text{CH}_2)_n$ where n is from 1 to 23 and that is unsubstituted or substituted by oxygen, Cl, F, Br, I, CF_3 , $-\text{SO}_2\text{OH}$.

[0038] The preferred alkyl sulfonic acids are methanesulfonic, ethanesulfonic and propanesulfonic acids; the preferred alkyl polysulfonic acids are methanedisulfonic acid, monochloromethanedisulfonic acid, dichloromethanedisulfonic acid, 1,1-ethanedisulfonic acid, 2-chloro-1,1-ethanedisulfonic acid, 1,2-dichloro-1,1-ethanedisulfonic acid, 1,1-propanedisulfonic

acid, 3-chloro-1,1-propanedisulfonic acid, 1,2-ethylene disulfonic acid, 1,3-propylene disulfonic acid, trifluoromethanesulfonic acid, butanesulfonic acid, perfluorobutanesulfonic acid, and pentanesulfonic acid; and the preferred aryl sulfonic acids are phenylsulfonic, phenolsulfonic, para-toulenesulfonic, and xylenesulfonic acids; or mixtures thereof.

[0039] The sulfonic acid may be used from a concentration range from less than 1 g/l to 1480 g/l, more preferably, at a concentration of about 10 to about 700 grams per liter of solution, still more preferably, at a concentration of from about 30 to about 500 grams per liter of solution.

[0040] The sulfonic acid solution of the invention may have a pH that is between -2 to 13.

[0041] The sulfonic acid of the invention may be an aqueous solution wherein the acid solution is a mixture of a sulfonic acid with other inorganic or organic acids.

[0042] As discussed above, electroplating solutions, batteries and de-scaling formulations of the invention are particularly effective in solubilizing active metals such as tin, nickel, cobalt, iron, zinc and more noble metals such as copper and silver without the production of an unwanted odor.

[0043] Pure sulfonic acid or metal sulfonate solutions of the invention generally comprise at least one soluble metal salt, an acid electrolyte, optionally a buffering agent, optionally plating bath additives generally referred to as leveling agents, brighteners, suppressors, conductivity salts and the like, and optionally a halogen ion. More particularly, electroplating compositions of the invention preferably contain a metal salt of an alkyl or aryl sulfonic acid of this invention; an electrolyte, preferably an acidic aqueous solution such as a sulfonic acid solution with optionally a buffering agent, optionally plating bath additives generally referred to as leveling agents, brighteners, suppressors and the like, and optionally a halogen ion and the like.

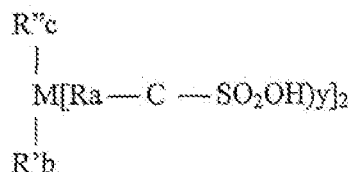
[0044] A variety of metal salts may also be in the sulfonic acid electrolyte of this invention, the exact composition is dependent upon the desired final metal finish and properties of the metallic coating. Metal sulfonate salts selected from Group 1B, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B,

6B, 7B, 8B, lanthanide and actinide metals of the periodic table and ammonium ion or mixtures thereof may be used.

[0045] Metal alkanesulfonate salts may be employed in the subject electroplating solutions wherein the alkanesulfonic acid of the anionic portion of the metal salt and any free acid are introduced as an alkyl or aryl sulfonic acid having the formula as above. The preferred alkyl sulfonic acids, alkyl polysulfonic acids and aryl sulfonic acids are as above. Metal methanesulfonates are particularly preferred metal salts.

[0046] The term metal sulfonate in this invention includes metals and metal alloys. Metals and alloys may be selected from Group 1B, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6B, 7B, and 8B, lanthanide and actinide metals of the periodic table as well as ammonium ion or mixtures thereof.

[0047] The metal salt of an alkyl or aryl sulfonic acid usually has the formula:



wherein $a+b+c+y$ equals 4,

R, R' and R'' are the same or different and each independently may be hydrogen, phenyl, Cl, F, Br, I, CF₃ or a C₁₋₉ alkyl group such as (CH₂)_n where n is from 1 to 23 and that is unsubstituted or substituted by oxygen, Cl, F, Br, I, CF₃, or -SO₂OH.

[0048] A metal sulfonate salt may be suitably present in a relatively wide concentration range in the aqueous sulfonic acid of the invention. Preferably, a metal salt will be employed at a concentration from about less than 1 grams per liter to about 500 grams per liter of plating solution, more preferably at a concentration of from about 20 to about 300 grams per liter of plating solution, still more preferably at a concentration of from about 40 to about 175 grams per liter of plating solution.

[0049] In addition, metal salts of sulfate, nitrate, sulfamate, and chloride from Group 1B, 2B, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6B, 7B, 8B, lanthanide and actinide metals of the periodic table and ammonium ion or mixtures thereof may also be used in this invention.

[0050] Preferred metal methanesulfonates are those of zinc, copper, nickel, ferrous, alkali earth metals and alkaline earth metals.

[0051] The electrolyte may also contain free acid to increase solution conductivity such as that needed in efficient batteries and electrodeposition processes. The preferred free acid has the same anion as the metal salt anion but mixtures of acids are also within the scope of this invention. Acids such as sulfuric, hydrochloric, sulfamic, acetic, propionic, phosphonic, tartaric, oxalic, phosphonic and nitric among others may be used in this invention.

[0052] The free acid concentration ranges from about less than 1 gram per liter to about 900 gram per liter, more preferably at a concentration of from about 2 to about 700 grams per liter of plating solution, still more preferably at a concentration of from about 10 to about 500 grams per liter of solution.

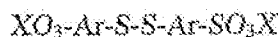
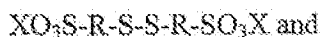
[0053] The invention also includes sulfonate solutions that are substantially or completely free of added inorganic or organic acids and may be neutral or basic (e.g. pH of at least less than about 13 to about 7). Such sulfonate electrolyte compositions are suitably prepared in the same manner with the same components as other compositions disclosed herein but without an added free sulfonic acid.

[0054] Electrochemical sulfonic solutions of the invention may employ a halide ion source, particularly a chloride ion source. Examples of other suitable halides include fluoride, bromide and iodide. A wide range of halide ion concentrations (if a halide ion is employed) may be suitably utilized, e.g. from about 0 (where no halide ion employed) to 500 g/l, in solution, more preferably from about 10 to about 400 g/l of halide ion source in the sulfonic acid solution.

[0055] In addition to the metal salts, aqueous acid electrolytes of the invention optionally may contain a variety of other components commonly known in the electrodeposition industry. These components are often referred to as additives such as suppressors agents, accelerator agents, leveling agents and the like. The use of a buffering agent in combination with a suppressor agent, an accelerator or brightener additive is particularly preferred and provides surprisingly enhanced plating performance, particularly in hard to plate features.

[0056] A buffering agent may be used with the sulfonic acids of this invention. The buffering agent regulates the pH during electrolysis. Examples of suitable buffering agents include monocarboxylic, dicarboxylic and tricarboxylic acid such as citric acid, tartaric acid, potassium sodium tartrate, amino acids, oxalic acid, nitrogen-containing carboxylic acids and phosphonic acids. Preferred is boric acid.

[0057] Useful brighteners include those of the following formula:



where in the above formulae R is an optionally substituted alkyl group, and preferably is an alkyl group having from 1 to 6 carbon atoms, more preferably is an alkyl group having from 1 to 4 carbon atoms; Ar is an optionally substituted aryl group such as optionally substituted phenyl or naphthyl; and X is a suitable counter ion such as ammonium, sodium or potassium. Some specific suitable brighteners include e.g. n,n-dimethyl-dithiocarbamic acid-(3-sulfopropyl)ester; 3-mercapto- propylsulfonic acid-(3-sulfopropyl)ester; 3-mercaptopropylsulfonic acid (sodium salt); carbonic acid-dithio-o-ethylester-s-ester with 3-mercapto-1-propane sulfonic acid (potassium salt); bissulfopropyl disulfide; 3-(benzthiazolyl- s-thio)propyl sulfonic acid (sodium salt); pyridinium propyl sulfobetaine; 1-sodium-3-mercaptopropane-1-sulfonate; sulfoalkyl sulfide compounds disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 3,778,357; the peroxide oxidation product of a dialkyl amino-thiox-methyl-thioalkanesulfonic acid; and combinations of the above. Additional suitable brighteners are also described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 3,770,598, 4,374,709, 4,376,685, 4,555,315, and 4,673,469, all incorporated herein by

reference. Particularly preferred brighteners for use in the plating compositions of the invention are n,n-dimethyl-dithiocarbamic acid-(3-sulfopropyl)ester and bis-sodium-sulfonopropyldisulfide.

[0058] Surfactants useful in the present invention include e.g. amines such as ethoxylated amines, polyoxyalkylene amines and alkanol amines; amides; polyglycol-type wetting agents, such as polyethylene glycols, polyalkylene glycols and polyoxyalkylene glycols; high molecular weight polyethers; polyethylene oxides (mol. wt. 100,000 to 3 million); block copolymers of polyoxy-alkyenes; alkylpolyether sulfonates; complexing surfactants such as alkoxyated diamines; Particularly suitable surfactants for plating compositions of the invention are commercially available polyethylene glycol copolymers, including polyethylene glycol copolymers.

[0059] Wetting agents may be used with the sulfonic acids of this invention. The wetting agents may be selected from cationic, anionic or non-ionic molecules.

[0060] The invention may also use complexing agents for metals particularly if the sulfonic acid of the invention is used in electrodeposition or de-scaling processes. Examples of suitable complexing agents include monocarboxylic, dicarboxylic and tricarboxylic acid such as citric acid, tartaric acid, potassium sodium tartrate, amino acids, particularly glycine, oxalic acid, alkylamines, alkylalkanol amine, EDTA and phosphonic acids.

[0061] Electrochemical processes of the invention may be carried out from less than ambient temperatures to elevated temperatures. Preferably, the electrochemical processes are used from about -20°C to above 95°C depending upon the processes in use.

[0062] The sulfonic acid solution may be stagnant or is preferably agitated during use such as by using an air sparger, physical movement of the work piece, ultrasonic radiation, impingement or other suitable methods.

[0063] Electrolysis is preferably conducted at a current density ranging from less than 0.1 to 3000 amperes per square foot (ASF) depending upon the process and the electrolyte characteristics.

[0064] Electrolysis times may range from about less than one minute to greater than twenty-four hours or more, depending on the difficulty of the work piece and the desired finish.

[0065] The invention described also includes the use of direct, pulse or periodic current waveforms to effectively produce a commercially acceptable metal or polymer coating.

[0066] The invention described may also use a soluble or an insoluble or inert electrode material.

[0067] A wide variety of substrates may be electroplated, de-scaled or coated with a conductive polymer with the compositions of the invention, as discussed above. The compositions of the invention are particularly useful to electroplate difficult work pieces, such as circuit board substrates with small diameter and low aspect vias or through-holes, integrated circuits with low aspect ratio vias, integrated circuits with high aspect ratio microvias and other electronic features. The plating compositions of the invention also will be particularly useful for plating integrated circuit devices, such as formed semiconductor devices and the like. The sulfonic acids of this invention will also be useful for the de-scaling of metals. The sulfonic acids of this invention will also be useful as an electrolyte in batteries and other energy storage devices and during the polymerization of organic monomers to form conductive polymers.

[0068] The foregoing description of the invention is merely illustrative thereof, and it is understood that variations and modifications can be effected without departing from the scope or spirit of the invention as set forth in the following claims.

Example 1

[0069] A. Commercially available 70% methanesulfonic acid (MSA) that contains a high concentration of methylmethanethiosulfonate, [MMTS, (CH₃SO₂SCH₃)] was purified by the following procedure:

- (1) 250 ml of 70% methanesulfonic acid containing 12 parts-per-million (ppm) was placed into a 500 ml beaker.
- (2) 30% hydrogen peroxide solution, 1.125 grams, was added and the MSA was heated to 140 degrees Fahrenheit for three hours.
- (3) The methanesulfonic acid solution was cooled to room temperature and analyzed for MMTS.

[0070] The concentration of MMTS after the hydrogen peroxide treatment was non-detectable by gas chromatography methods. After purification the MSA was diluted to 15% by the addition of water.

[0071] B. A sample of 15% methanesulfonic acid (MSA) made according to Example 1A was electrolyzed using a pure tin anode, an insoluble iridium oxide-coated titanium cathode. During electrolysis, tin dissolved into the 15% MSA. Trichloromethylmethylsulfone (TCMS) was added incrementally and the headspace gas above the electrochemical cell was smelled for detectable odor. After about 0.9 ppm of TCMS was added, an odor was noticeable.

Example 2

[0072] A sample of 15% methanesulfonic acid (MSA) made as in Example 1(A) was electrolyzed using a pure tin anode, an insoluble iridium oxide-coated titanium cathode.

[0073] During electrolysis, tin dissolved into the 15% MSA. Methylmethanethiosulfonate (MMTS) was incrementally added and the headspace gas above the electrochemical cell was smelled for detectable odor. After about 0.25 ppm of MMTS was added, an odor was noticeable. MMTS was seen to decompose using chromatographic techniques to primarily dimethyldisulfide (DMDS) in the electrolysis cell. Methylmercaptan (CH₃SH) and dimethylsulfide (DMS) were also observed after electrolysis, both odorous impurities.

Example 3

[0074] A sample of 15% methanesulfonic acid (MSA) made as in Example 1(A) was electrolyzed using a pure tin anode, an insoluble iridium oxide-coated titanium cathode.

[0075] During electrolysis, tin dissolved into the 15% MSA. Methylmethanethiosulfonate (MMTS) was incrementally added up to 0.85 ppm. An odor was detectable. To this solution was added 1.0 ppm of Trichloromethylsulfone (TCMS). A very pungent odor was observed indicating a synergy between the two impurities in producing the undesirable odor.

Example 4

[0076] A sample of 15% methanesulfonic acid (MSA) made as in Example 1(A) was electrolyzed using a pure tin anode, an insoluble iridium oxide-coated titanium cathode.

[0077] During electrolysis, tin dissolved into the 15% MSA. Trichloromethylsulfone (TCMS) was added and after electrolysis, the MSA in the electrolysis cell contained dimethylsulfide and dimethyldisulfide leading to an undesirable odor.

Example 5

[0078] A sample of 15% methanesulfonic acid (MSA) made as in Example 1(A) was electrolyzed using a pure tin anode, an insoluble iridium oxide-coated titanium cathode.

[0079] During electrolysis, tin dissolved into the 15% MSA. After electrolysis, the MSA contained no undesirable low-valent sulfur compounds. A similar study was done but 1 ppm of MMTS was added to the MSA and after electrolysis, an odor was detected and the analysis showed dimethylsulfide, methylsulfide, dimethyldisulfide and dimethyltrisulfide were present in the MSA.

Example 6

[0080] Two purities of methanesulfonic acid (MSA) were tested.

[0081] One was commercially available 70%MSA; the other 70%MSA of the present invention which was made according to the procedure of Example 1 except that it was not diluted.

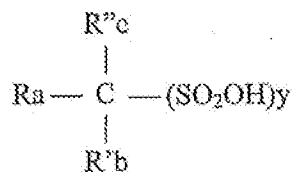
[0082] The impurities, with amounts, in each composition is as follows:

| Component ID | Weight %, ppm (unless indicated) | |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| | 70% MSA of the invention | Commercial 70% MSA |
| DMS | 0.05 | < 0.5 |
| MMS | None | |
| DMSO ₂ | <5 | 20 |
| MCMS | 1 | 2 |
| MMTS | <1 | 10 |
| DCMS | 0.1 | < 0.5 |
| TCMS | None | 2 |
| Other Unknowns (total) | <1 | 4 |

[0083] A zinc methanesulfonate solution was prepared by dissolving zinc carbonate in 70% methanesulfonic acid as listed above. The final concentration of zinc ion was 65 g/l. During dissolution of zinc in the impure 70% MSA, a pungent odor was observed while the zinc solution prepared using the clean 70% MSA emitted no significant odor. An additional 1 molar free MSA was added to each zinc methanesulfonate solution, the same 70% MSA that was used to prepare the zinc electrolyte. Electrodeposition of zinc from each solution was done on clean steel panels at 60 amperes per square foot (ASF). The zinc deposit plated from the clean 70% MSAS electrolyte was matte gray and uniform while the zinc deposit plated from the impure 70% zinc solution was dark, rough and commercially unacceptable.

Claims

1. An aqueous solution for use in an electrochemical process, the solution comprising a sulfonic acid and low concentrations of low-valent sulfur (II) compounds and higher-valent sulfur (IV) compounds that are susceptible to reduction.
2. The solution of Claim 1 wherein the low-valent sulfur (II) compounds and higher-valent sulfur (IV) compounds are dimethyldisulfide, dimethylsulfide, dimethylsulfone, trichloromethylmethethylsulfone, dicloromethylmethethylsulfone, methylmethanethiosulfonate, and methylmethanesulfonate.
3. The solution of Claim 1 for use in electrodeposition, batteries, conductive polymers and descaling processes.
4. The solution of Claim 1 wherein the total amount of reduced sulfur(IV) compounds is less than 50 mg/liter.
5. The solution of Claim 1 wherein the concentration of reduced sulfur(II) compounds is less than 50 mg/liter.
6. The solution of Claim 1 wherein the sulfonic acid is derived from an alkyl monosulfonic acid, an alkyl polysulfonic acid or an aryl mono or polysulfonic acid.
7. The solution of Claim 1 wherein the sulfonic acid is introduced as:



wherein $a+b+c+y$ equals 4,

R, R' and R'' are the same or different and each independently may be hydrogen, phenyl, Cl, F, Br, I, CF_3 or a lower C_{1-9} alkyl group that is unsubstituted or substituted by oxygen, Cl, F, Br, I, CF_3 , $-\text{SO}_2\text{OH}$.

8. The solution of Claim 7 wherein sulfonic acid is methanesulfonic acid, ethanesulfonic acid, propanesulfonic acid, methanedisulfonic acid, monochloromethanedisulfonic acid, dichloromethanedisulfonic acid, 1,1-ethanedisulfonic acid, 2-chloro-1,1-ethanedisulfonic acid, 1,2-dichloro-1,1-ethanedisulfonic acid, 1,1-propanedisulfonic acid, 3-chloro-1,1-propanedisulfonic acid, 1,2-ethylene disulfonic acid, 1,3-propylene disulfonic acid, trifluoromethanesulfonic acid, butanesulfonic acid, perfluorobutanesulfonic acid, pentanesulfonic acid, phenylsulfonic acid, phenolsulfonic acid, para-toulenesulfonic acid, xylenesulfonic acid or mixtures thereof.

9. The composition of Claim 7 wherein the sulfonic acid is a free alkanesulfonic acid and has a concentration range from 1 to 1480 g/l.

10. The composition of Claim 9, wherein the concentration of the free alkanesulfonic acid is about 10 to about 700 grams per liter of solution.

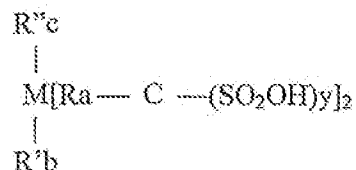
11. The composition of Claim 9, wherein the concentration of the free alkanesulfonic acid is about 30 to about 500 grams per liter of solution.

12. The composition of Claim 1 wherein the pH is between -2 to 13.

13. The solution of Claim 1 wherein the acid is a mixture of a sulfonic acid with other inorganic or organic acids.

14. The solution of Claim 1 which contains a metal sulfonate salt or other metal salts and free sulfonic acids and which is intended for use in electrodeposition, batteries, conductive polymers or descaling processes.

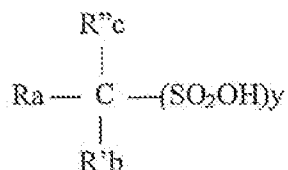
15. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal salt is introduced as an alkyl or aryl sulfonic acid of formula:



wherein $a+b+c+y$ equals 4,

R, R' and R'' are the same or different and each independently may be hydrogen, phenyl, Cl, F, Br, I, CF₃ or a C₁₋₉ alkyl group such as (CH₂)_n where n is from 1 to 23 and that is unsubstituted or substituted by oxygen, Cl, F, Br, I, CF₃, or -SO₂OH.

16. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the sulfonic acid of the anionic portion of the metal salt and any free acid are introduced as an alkyl sulfonic acid of formula:



wherein $a+b+c+y$ equals 4,

R, R' and R'' are the same or different and each independently may be hydrogen, phenyl, Cl, F, Br, I, CF₃ or a C₁₋₉ alkyl group such and that is unsubstituted or substituted by oxygen, Cl, F, Br, I, CF₃, -SO₂OH.

17. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal salt will be employed at a concentration from about 1 to about 600 grams per liter of electrolyte solution.

18. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the alkanesulfonic acid is methanesulfonic acid, ethanesulfonic acid, propanesulfonic acid, trifluoromethanesulfonic acid or mixtures thereof.

19. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal-sulfonic acid salt is selected from metals in

Group 1B, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6B, 7B, 8B, lanthanide or actinide metals of the periodic table and ammonium ion or mixtures thereof.

20. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal sulfonic acid salt is zinc methanesulfonate.
21. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal sulfonic acid salt is copper methanesulfonate.
22. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal sulfonic acid salt is nickel methanesulfonate.
23. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal sulfonic acid salt is ferrous methanesulfonate.
24. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal sulfonic acid salt is an alkali or alkaline earth metal.
25. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the sulfonic acid salt is supplied as a mixture of a metal sulfonate salts selected from metals in Group 1B, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6B, 7B, 8B, lanthanide and actinide metals of the periodic table and ammonium ion.
26. The solution of Claim 1 wherein a buffering agent is added to modulate the pH of the electrolyte.
27. The solution of Claim 26 wherein the buffer is boric acid.
28. The solution of Claim 1 which contains an organic monomer selected from aniline or substituted aniline or pyrrole.
29. A process for the preparation of high purity alkanesulfonic acids wherein free alkanesulfonic acid is first treated to remove low-valent sulfur molecules by:
adding to the free sulfonic acid sufficient oxidizing agent to increase the valency of the impurity sulfur molecules,

mixing the sulfonic acid at temperatures between 25°C to about 95°C for a sufficient time to complete the oxidation process,
optionally, heating the alkanesulfonic acid to elevated temperatures to remove residual oxidizing agent, and
optionally, adding activated carbon powder to remove residual impurities.

30. The process of Claim 29 wherein the oxidizing agent is selected from hydrogen peroxide, nitric acid, permanganate, an anodic electric current, monoperoxysulfate, aqueous solution of chlorine, a halogen in a solution of a carboxylic acid.

31. A process of making metal-sulfonate solutions by dissolving pure metal, metal carbonate, metal oxide or other metal salts into a purified sulfonic acid according to Claim 1 wherein the metal ion concentration varies from 1 g/l to 500 g/l.

32. A process for the deposition of a metal from the solution in Claim 14 and passing an electric current through the solution to electroplate a metal or a metal alloy unto a substrate.

33. The process of Claim 32 wherein the substrate is a semiconductor device, a printed circuit board, an inert electrode, steel, copper or copper-alloy, nickel or nickel-alloy, cobalt or cobalt alloy, a refractory metal or oxide, carbon or an organic substrate.

34. The process of Claim 32 wherein the acid is methanesulfonic acid.

35. The process of Claim 32 that contains a mixture of sulfonic acids and other inorganic and organic acids.

36. The process of Claim 32 wherein direct current, pulsed current or periodic reverse current is used.

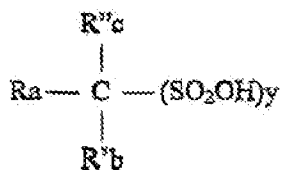
37. The process of Claim 32 wherein a soluble or an insoluble or inert anode is used.

38. The process of Claim 32 wherein the temperature of the metal sulfonic acid electrolyte is between 0°C to 95°C.
39. The process of Claim 32 wherein the metal is pure or a metal alloy with a metal from Group 1B, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6B, 7B, 8B, the lanthanide or actinide metals or alloys thereof.
40. A process for the de-scaling of a metal using the solution in Claim 6 and passing an electric current through the solution to remove the oxide layer of a metal or a metal alloy on a substrate.
41. The process of Claim 40 wherein the substrate is a semiconductor device, a printed circuit board, an inert electrode, steel, copper or copper-alloy, nickel or nickel-alloy, cobalt or cobalt alloy, a refractory metal or oxide, carbon or an organic substrate.
42. The process of Claim 40 wherein the acid is methanesulfonic acid.
43. The process of Claim 40 that contains a mixture of sulfonic acids and other inorganic and organic acids.
44. The process of Claim 40 wherein direct current, pulsed current or periodic reverse current is used.
45. The process of Claim 40 wherein a soluble or an insoluble or inert electrode is used.
46. An article of manufacture comprising an electronic device, a metal or metal alloy, a battery device, a conductive polymer or a metal surface free of oxides obtained from a composition from Claim 1.

AMENDED CLAIMS

[received by the International Bureau on 10 September 2004 (10.09.04)
original claims 3-6,8-14,20-24,27,28,33,37,38,42 and 45 are unchanged ;
Claims 1,2,7,15-19,25,26,29-32,34-36,39-41,43 and 44 have been amended ;
Claim 46 has been cancelled. (7 pages)]

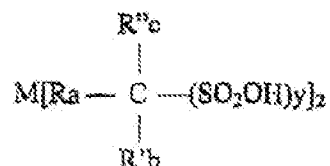
1. An aqueous solution for use in an electrochemical process, the solution comprising a sulfonic acid and low concentrations of low-valent sulfur (II) and sulfur (IV) compounds and higher-valent sulfur (VI) compounds that are susceptible to reduction.
2. The solution of Claim 1 wherein the low-valent sulfur (II) and sulfur (IV) compounds and higher-valent sulfur (VI) compounds are dimethyl disulfide, dimethyl sulfide, dimethyl sulfone, trichloromethyl methyl sulfone, dichloromethyl methyl sulfone, methyl methanethiosulfonate, and methyl methanesulfonate.
3. The solution of Claim 1 for use in electrodeposition, batteries, conductive polymers and descaling processes.
4. The solution of Claim 1 wherein the total amount of reduced sulfur(IV) compounds is less than 50 mg/liter.
5. The solution of Claim 1 wherein the concentration of reduced sulfur(II) compounds is less than 50 mg/liter.
6. The solution of Claim 1 wherein the sulfonic acid is derived from an alkyl monosulfonic acid, an alkyl polysulfonic acid or an aryl mono or polysulfonic acid.
7. The solution of Claim 1 wherein the sulfonic acid is:



wherein $a+b+c+y$ equals 4, R, R' and R'' are the same or different and each independently are hydrogen, phenyl, Cl, F, Br, I, CF_3 or a lower C_{1-9} alkyl group that is unsubstituted or substituted by oxygen, Cl, F, Br, I, CF_3 , or $-\text{SO}_2\text{OH}$.

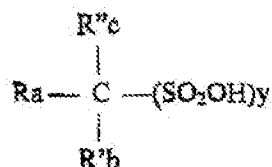
8. The solution of Claim 7 wherein sulfonic acid is methanesulfonic acid, ethanesulfonic acid, propanesulfonic acid, methanedisulfonic acid, monochloromethanedisulfonic acid, dichloromethanedisulfonic acid, 1,1-ethanedisulfonic acid, 2-chloro-1,1-ethanedisulfonic acid, 1,2-dichloro-1,1-ethanedisulfonic acid, 1,1-propanedisulfonic acid, 3-chloro-1,1-propanedisulfonic acid, 1,2-ethylene disulfonic acid, 1,3-propylene disulfonic acid, trifluoromethanesulfonic acid, butanesulfonic acid, perfluorobutanesulfonic acid, pentanesulfonic acid, phenylsulfonic acid, phenolsulfonic acid, para-toulenesulfonic acid, xylenesulfonic acid or mixtures thereof.
9. The composition of Claim 7 wherein the sulfonic acid is a free alkanesulfonic acid and has a concentration range from 1 to 1480 g/l.
10. The composition of Claim 9, wherein the concentration of the free alkanesulfonic acid is about 10 to about 700 grams per liter of solution.
11. The composition of Claim 9, wherein the concentration of the free alkanesulfonic acid is about 30 to about 500 grams per liter of solution.
12. The composition of Claim 1 wherein the pH is between -2 to 13.
13. The solution of Claim 1 wherein the acid is a mixture of a sulfonic acid with other inorganic or organic acids.
14. The solution of Claim 1 which contains a metal sulfonate salt or other metal salts and free sulfonic acids and which is intended for use in electrodeposition, batteries, conductive polymers or descaling processes.

15. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal salt is introduced as an alkyl or aryl sulfonic acid of formula:



wherein $a+b+c+y$ equals 4, M is a metal selected from metals in Group 1B, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6B, 7B, 8B, lanthanide or actinide metals of the periodic table and ammonium ion or mixtures thereof, R, R' and R'' are the same or different and each independently is hydrogen, phenyl, Cl, F, Br, I, CF_3 or a C_{1-23} alkyl group that is unsubstituted or substituted by oxygen, Cl, F, Br, I, CF_3 , or $-\text{SO}_2\text{OH}$.

16. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the sulfonic acid of the anionic portion of the metal salt and any free sulfonic acids are introduced as an alkyl sulfonic acid of formula:



wherein $a+b+c+y$ equals 4,

R, R' and R'' are the same or different and each independently are hydrogen, phenyl, Cl, F, Br, I, CF_3 or a C_{1-23} alkyl group that is unsubstituted or substituted by oxygen, Cl, F, Br, I, CF_3 , or $-\text{SO}_2\text{OH}$.

17. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal salts will be employed at a concentration from about 1 to about 600 grams per liter of aqueous solution.

18. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the sulfonic acid is methanesulfonic acid, ethanesulfonic acid, propanesulfonic acid, trifluoromethanesulfonic acid or mixtures thereof.
19. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal sulfonate salt or other metal salts is selected from metals in Group 1B, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6B, 7B, 8B, lanthanide or actinide metals of the periodic table and ammonium ion or mixtures thereof.
20. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal sulfonic acid salt is zinc methanesulfonate.
21. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal sulfonic acid salt is copper methanesulfonate.
22. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal sulfonic acid salt is nickel methanesulfonate.
23. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal sulfonic acid salt is ferrous methanesulfonate.
24. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal sulfonic acid salt is an alkali or alkaline earth metal.
25. The solution of Claim 14 wherein the metal sulfonate salt or other metal salt is supplied as a mixture of a metal sulfonate salts selected from metals in Group 1B, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6B, 7B, 8B, lanthanide and actinide metals of the periodic table and ammonium ion.
26. The solution of Claim 1 wherein a buffering agent is added to modulate the pH of the aqueous solution.

27. The solution of Claim 26 wherein the buffer is boric acid.
28. The solution of Claim 1 which contains an organic monomer selected from aniline or substituted aniline or pyrrole.
29. A process for the preparation of high purity alkanesulfonic acids wherein free alkanesulfonic acid is first treated to remove low-valent sulfur molecules by: adding to the free alkanesulfonic acid sufficient oxidizing agent to increase the valency of the low-valent sulfur molecules, mixing the sulfonic acid at temperatures between 25°C to about 95°C for a sufficient time to increase the valency of the low-valent sulfur molecules, optionally, heating the alkanesulfonic acid to elevated temperatures to remove residual oxidizing agent, and optionally, adding activated carbon powder to remove residual impurities.
30. The process of Claim 29 wherein the oxidizing agent is selected from hydrogen peroxide, nitric acid, permanganate, an anodic electric current, monoperoxysulfate, aqueous solution of chlorine, or a halogen in a solution of a carboxylic acid.
31. A process of making metal-sulfonate solutions by dissolving sufficient pure metal, metal carbonate, metal oxide or other metal salts into an aqueous solution according to Claim 1 to provide a metal ion concentration varies from 1 g/l to 500 g/l.
32. A process for the deposition of a metal from the solution in Claim 14 comprising passing an electric current through the solution to electroplate a metal or a metal alloy onto a substrate.
33. The process of Claim 32 wherein the substrate is a semiconductor device, a printed circuit board, an inert electrode, steel, copper or copper-alloy, nickel or

nickel-alloy, cobalt or cobalt alloy, a refractory metal or oxide, carbon or an organic substrate.

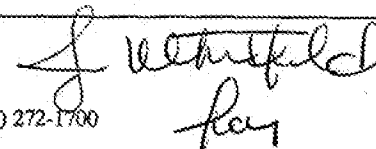
34. The process of Claim 32 wherein the sulfonic acid is methanesulfonic acid.
35. The process of Claim 32 wherein the aqueous solution contains a mixture of sulfonic acids and other inorganic and organic acids.
36. The process of Claim 32 wherein the electric current is a direct current, pulsed current or periodic reverse current.
37. The process of Claim 32 wherein a soluble or an insoluble or inert anode is used.
38. The process of Claim 32 wherein the temperature of the metal sulfonic acid electrolyte is between 0°C to 95°C.
39. The process of Claim 32 wherein the metal is a pure metal or a metal alloy, the metal selected from Group 1B, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6B, 7B, 8B, the lanthanide or actinide metals or alloys thereof.
40. A process for the de-scaling of a metal item comprising immersing a metal item having a scale layer thereon into the solution of Claim 6 and passing an electric current through the solution to remove the scale layer.
41. The process of Claim 40 wherein the metal item is a semiconductor device, a printed circuit board, an inert electrode, steel, copper or copper-alloy, nickel or nickel-alloy, cobalt or cobalt alloy, a refractory metal or oxide, carbon or an organic substrate.
42. The process of Claim 40 wherein the acid is methanesulfonic acid.

43. The process of Claim 40 wherein the aqueous solution contains a mixture of sulfonic acids and other inorganic and organic acids.
44. The process of Claim 40 wherein the electric current is a direct current, pulsed current or periodic reverse current.
45. The process of Claim 40 wherein a soluble or an insoluble or inert electrode is used.

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US04/12887

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|--|---|--|
| A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER IPC(7) : C25D 5/00, 21/18; C23C 16/00; C25B 3/00; C02F 1/72; C25B 1/02; H01F 3/06; H01M 6/00 US CL : 106/1.25, 1.26, 1.27, 1.28; 205/80, 334, 238, 261, 560, 413, 414, 99, 157, 123, 125, 164, 159, 103, 10; 210/758, 759 According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC | | |
| B. FIELDS SEARCHED Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) U.S. : 106/1.25, 1.26, 1.27, 1.28; 205/80, 334, 238, 261, 560, 413, 414, 99, 157, 123, 125, 164, 159, 103, 10; 210/758, 759 Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used) | | |
| C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT | | |
| Category * | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages | Relevant to claim No. |
| Y | US 6,187,169 B1 (GERNON et al.) 13 February 2001 (13.02.2001), col. 2, lines 59-63. | 29,30 |
| X | US 2001/0053449 A1 (PAREKH et al.) 20 December 2001 (20.12.2001), page 11, claim 37. | 46 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex. | | |
| * Special categories of cited documents: | | |
| "A" | document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance | "T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention |
| "E" | earlier application or patent published on or after the international filing date | "X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone |
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| "O" | document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means | "&" document member of the same patent family |
| "P" | document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed | |
| Date of the actual completion of the international search 13 August 2004 (13.08.2004) | | Date of mailing of the international search report 20 AUG 2004 |
| Name and mailing address of the ISA/US Mail Stop PCT, Attn: ISA/US Commissioner for Patents P.O. Box 1450 Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450 Facsimile No. (703) 305-3230 | | Authorized officer Edna Wong Telephone No. (572) 272-1700  |